An Analysis of TABE Reading Test Components to Determine Deficient Reading Skills in English Language Learners at Chippewa Valley Technical College

by

Laura E. Hegeman

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Dr. James Lehmann

Digitally signed by Dr. James Lehmann
DN: cn=Dr. James Lehmann, c=US
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Dr. James Lehmann
Research Advisor

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

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The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI

Author: **Hegeman, Laura E.**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to show the relationship between the reading skills of transitional English language learners (ELLs) at Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) and the effect inadequate reading skills have on the students' potential to achieve a grade equivalent of 12.9 on the TABE reading test. A case study was conducted to analyze the TABE reading test results of 16 English language learners from CVTC's transitional English as a Second Language (ESL) program who failed to meet the 12.9 grade level equivalent. It was found the average grade equivalent of CVTC ELL transition students was 5.3, which is just above fifth grade. Furthermore, the results show that these students experienced difficulty in four out of five diagnostic areas of the test. Effective research-based reading instruction and strategies were identified to address the specific areas of reading deficiencies that these students exhibited. This

information will help ESL instructors at CVTC who work with transitional ELL students to provide research-based reading instruction proactively before students take the TABE Reading test. If students have adequate reading skills to pass the TABE reading test, there is a greater chance they may be successful in their program at CVTC and they will be less likely to drop out of school.

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin Stout

Menomonie, WI

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Chapter I: Introduction

A significant problem that educators face today is that every student that walks into their classrooms has unique needs. This is especially true in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. These students usually come from countries outside the United States. They have diverse cultural, familial, economic, and educational backgrounds. Subsequently, they have different levels of literacy in comparison to their classmates and, unfortunately, some have none at all.

A large number of multicultural individuals in Eau Claire, Wisconsin attend ESL classes at Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC). These classes are open to adults from all cultures. Students may come with little to no educational experience, or they may have advanced degrees. Some students advance quicker than others, but one characteristic seems to remain the same: most of these students have deficient English reading skills. Of the 81 students enrolled in the ESL program at CVTC in the fall of 2009, only four of them (4.9%) pre-tested at an advanced reading level (Chippewa Valley Technical College, 2009).

English language learners (ELLs) are encouraged to enter a program at CVTC after they have mastered their English skills. These students are considered "transitional," and ESL instructors strive to prepare these students for success in a program. In order to be accepted into a program at CVTC, all students must take the COMPASS test. The COMPASS test allows schools to quickly evaluate incoming students' skill levels, place them in appropriate courses, and connect them to the resources they need to achieve academic success (ACT, 2009). The COMPASS consists of three tests that focus on a student's ability to demonstrate basic proficiencies in Math, Reading, and Writing. Each of the 75 programs offered by CVTC has a

list of requirements that students need to possess in order to be accepted into that program. Unfortunately, all too often ELLs often find that they did not meet the required COMPASS reading score for their program and are instructed to take remedial reading classes.

Statement of the Problem

A current problem is that transition English language learners (ELLs) who are enrolled in programs at CVTC have very low reading levels. In the fall of 2008, 16 multicultural transitional ELLs at CVTC who didn't meet the required COMPASS reading score for their program took the TABE 9 Complete Battery Level A Reading Test in their remedial reading class. Only one of these students tested at an 8th grade reading level, which is the reading level that CVTC students need in order to successfully work on their high school diploma or GED. The rest of the students fell far below this level. Since most of these students have at least a high school diploma, they should be reading at the 12th grade level in order to be successful in a CVTC program.

Purpose of the Study

The issue of inadequate reading skills in English language learners (ELLs) is vital to CVTC faculty and staff. It is currently unknown why so many ELLs are unable to pass the TABE Reading test with a grade level equivalent higher than 8th grade. Consequently, there is a need for further research to identify specific areas of the TABE Reading test that are problematic for ELLs. Therefore, the purpose of this study will be to determine specific reading deficiencies of ELLs at CVTC who take the TABE Reading test and to identify research-based reading methods and strategies that will help instructors to better prepare students for this test.

A case study was conducted to analyze the results of the TABE Reading test for each transitional English language learner who took a test in the fall of 2008. Effective research-based reading remediation strategies will be described and provided to CVTC ESL instructors who work with transitional ELLs to help students improve their reading skills before they take the TABE Reading test or during potential remediation periods. Using research-based reading strategies, students will have a greater opportunity to improve the specific comprehension and vocabulary skills that are necessary to pass the TABE Reading test with a 12.9 grade level equivalent. Helping ELL students build reading skills that will help them pass the TABE Reading test could increase minority student retention at CVTC. Furthermore, by becoming successful in a program and obtaining an advanced degree, students will improve their employment potential. The research will address the following questions:

1. What is the average reading level for ELL transition students at CVTC?
2. What inadequate reading skills did the ELL students demonstrate on the TABE Reading test?

Assumptions

This study acknowledges the following assumptions: (1) the TABE Reading test developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill is a valid testing instrument that accurately measures students' reading levels and accurately identifies each student's inadequate reading skills with diagnostic indicators, (2) students who receive proactive research-based reading instruction before they take the TABE Reading test may be more likely to meet the 12.9 grade level equivalent than those who do not.

Definition of Terms

In order to fully understand the focus of this study, one must be familiar with the terminology used:

ACT. ACT is an independent, non-profit organization that provides a broad array of assessment, research, information, and program management solutions in the areas of education and workforce development. ACT develops the COMPASS exam, the required entrance exam for all CVTC students.

Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC). CVTC is part of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) serving an eleven-county area. The largest campus is located in Eau Claire with major regional centers in Chippewa Falls, Menomonie, Neillsville and River Falls. For the remainder of this study, the acronym CVTC will be used.

COMPASS. The COMPASS is a college entrance exam offered by ACT which allows schools to quickly evaluate incoming students' skill levels, place them in appropriate courses, and connect them to the resources they need to achieve academic success. All CVTC students must take the COMPASS test prior to being accepted into a program.

English as a Second Language (ESL). English as a second language is a commonly used term for the use or study of English by speakers of a different native language.

English Language Learner (ELL). An English language learner is a person who is in the process of acquiring English language skills and has a first language other than English.

Grade Equivalency. When ELL students take the TABE Reading assessment, their scores designate a grade equivalency between 0 and 12.9, which locate where students' reading levels are from kindergarten to 12^{th} grade.

Illiteracy. Illiteracy indicates the inability to read and write.

Literacy. Literacy indicates the quality or state of being literate, especially the ability to read and write.

Remediation. Remediation is the process of sending CVTC students who do not meet the recommended or required COMPASS score for their program to remedial classes, which concentrate on improving basic skills and preparing students to be successful in their program classes.

Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). The TABE is a testing instrument developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill. It will be used in this study to assess the reading level of adult English language learners. The results of the test give each student a grade equivalent as well as diagnostic recommendations to improve specific reading skills. For the remainder of this study, the acronym TABE will be used.

Transitional student. A transitional student is an ELL student that is preparing to transition from ESL classes into a program at CVTC.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this research are based on a specific case study that included only 16 transitional ELL students from the Chippewa Valley; therefore, the findings and results cannot be generalized beyond the scope of this study.

Methodology

In the fall of 2008, 16 transition ELL students at CVTC were administered the TABE Reading test. Each student had 50 minutes to complete the multiple choice test. When finished, the tests were scored and each student was given a grade level equivalent between 0 and 12.9,

with 12.9 being the reading level of a college student. Each student also received a list of diagnostics which showed the areas of the test that were most problematic.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Illiteracy is a growing problem in the United States, not only with Americans, but also with multicultural immigrants. According to McHugh, Gelatt, and Fix (2007), there are an estimated 750,000 immigrants in the United States that are illiterate in their native language. This is partly due to the increasing amount of immigrants that come from countries where a large portion of the population does not have access to literacy or where the native language is not written (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003). The need for English language instruction has increased rapidly over the last 20 years. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of limited English proficient students in American schools rose 76% (Thompson, 2004).

Learner Goals

Learners' needs for literacy are referred to as literacy goals. Adult English language learners have a variety of reasons for wanting English literacy. Some of the most common reasons are to gain successful employment and support themselves and their families (Marshall, 2002). Many learners want to improve conversational skills in order to advance in the workplace. They have difficulty advancing in their jobs or receiving the job training they need until they have learned English at a functional level. Other reasons are to communicate with doctors and the teachers of their children, participate in the community, gain U.S. citizenship, and pursue further education such as earning a GED or a college degree.

According to McHugh, Gelatt, and Fix (2007), approximately 2.4 million immigrants between the ages of 17 and 24 need English instruction in order to begin postsecondary education without the need for remediation classes. In order to rise one level of English ability, it takes an average of 110 hours of instruction (National Reporting System, 2009). At that rate, it

would require approximately 277 million hours of English language instruction a year, for six years, to bring all current ELLs to a level of English proficiency needed to begin postsecondary education. Unfortunately, efforts to develop large-scale, high-quality instructional services have lost speed. There are numerous dynamics that contribute to a student's ability to learn English and these factors will be discussed in the following section.

Factors Influencing Adult Literacy Development in English

Personal factors. Every English language learner enters the classroom with a variety of challenges that may impede the learning process. These can range from age, socioeconomic status, gender, or educational background. Students often cite commuting issues as a hindrance to attending classes. Due to their low education levels, they often cannot afford childcare and therefore cannot attend classes. Moreover, many state that family responsibilities are too time-consuming and they do not have time to come to school. Some students will increase English proficiency simply by living in the United States for several years and interacting with English-speaking people (McHugh et al., 2007). Others can advance skills through self-study and a personal, determined effort toward practicing and improving their English on a daily basis.

Cultural differences. Due to cultural differences, many English language learners may be unfamiliar with certain concepts that are taught in the traditional American classroom. ELLs often come from cultures where they are not encouraged to brainstorm ideas, think creatively, or express opinions (Haynes, 2006). They may also be unfamiliar with drawing conclusions and analyzing characters. In addition, Haynes states that specific difficulties include: (a) understanding passages that contain a large number of unfamiliar words, (b) understanding text that includes an abundance of idioms, figurative language, imagery, and symbolism, (c)

recognizing relationships between letters and sounds, (d) using homonyms and synonyms, (e) comprehending the meaning of a text, and (f) grasping difficult literary terms.

Prior Education in Native Language

Illiteracy in a native language can often greatly obstruct a person from learning English. The most significant variable in how long it takes a student to learn English has been determined to be the amount of formal schooling students have received in their native language (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Phonemic awareness and knowledge of English grammar, sentence structure, and even the alphabet have a huge influence on the level of difficulty for an ESL student. Because many students are illiterate in their native language, it is then no surprise these students find it extremely difficult to learn a second language. Educators are responsible for teaching each and every one of these students to the best of their abilities. The question is whether there are better methods in instructing these students so that every student, regardless of literacy level, has the opportunity to learn English.

Some students are born in the United States but have grown up in households that speak a language other than English (Haynes, 2006). Others arrive in the classroom having received varying amounts of formal education in their native countries. Moreover, some students have attended American schools for several years, but may still be in the early stages of language acquisition. Research has confirmed the time needed to learn to read in English is most closely related to a student's language base and literacy skills, regardless of their native language (Flynn & Hill, 2006).

According to Burt, Peyton, & Adams (2003), students with limited or no literacy in their native language more likely have had little experience with formal education. They may not be

used to sitting in desks for long periods of time, listening to a teacher speak in the front of the class, or interacting with other adults as fellow learners. They may lack study skills and be unfamiliar with proper classroom behavior. Therefore, they most likely will not learn in the same manner as learners who have had more experience with formal education.

Students who are literate in their native language have a surplus of skills to draw on when they learn academic English, even when the writing system of their native language is different from that of the English language (Flynn & Hill, 2006). Once students grasp the underlying literacy skills of one language, they can use these same skills to learn another language. However, regardless of a student's age or educational experiences, if a concept does not exist in that student's native language, it will be difficult to learn.

Economic Factors

Today's economy offers few opportunities for progression without English proficiency. Many researchers claim that there is a direct correlation that can be made between literacy and income. Adults who participate in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs frequently report major wage gains and improved job prospects (Center for an Urban Future, 2008). According to McHugh, Gelatt, and Fix (2007), increased English ability is linked to higher income, with the greatest benefits for highly educated immigrants who can make use of specialized training once they have the English skills needed to do so. They have found immigrants who are proficient in English earn between 13 to 24% more than those who are not. They also believe that investments in English language instruction can be expected to raise immigrants' productivity, earnings, and income tax payments. In addition, they found increased wages contribute to a reduction in the poverty rate, as well as lower rates of public benefits use,

which increases fiscal returns on investment in English language instruction. According to the National Adult Literacy Survey (1992), which is the largest assessment of adult literacy funded by the federal government, the price of adult illiteracy can cost more than $17 billion per year as a result of lost income and tax revenue, crime and incarceration, training cost for business and industry, welfare, and unemployment. Many critics, however, are skeptical and say many figures correlating illiteracy with low income are misleading and leave out a wide range of complex factors (SIL International, 2008).

McHugh, Gelatt, and Fix (2007), estimate basic instructional costs to be approximately $10 per hour of classroom instruction per student. This results in a cost of $1,100 per student, per level of English proficiency. The federal government has provided approximately $250 to $300 million a year for adult ESL as part of Adult Basic Education (ABE) grants to states. States have contributed an estimated $700 million per year. Although federally funded ESL programs are currently serving approximately 1.1 million adults in the United States, many states report long waiting lists for ABE and ESL classes.

Teaching methods. The use of a student's native language to teach English has been proved in many studies to be an effective method of teaching. Slavin and Cheung (2004) found English language instructional programs that use an English language learner's native language for early reading instruction were more effective in most of the studies that they examined. Thomas and Collier (1997) found students who studied English using their native languages took four to seven years to achieve a 50th percentile reading performance in English, while students taught solely in English usually took seven to ten years to reach the same performance level. A study of adult Haitians learning English in New York City (Burtoff, 1985) found those who

received native language literacy instruction while learning English developed greater literacy skills than did those who were only taught in English.

Complexity of the English language. According to Bridie (2009), research has confirmed English is one of the most difficult languages to learn to read, with students taking at least two years to begin to grasp it versus the three or four months it takes students learning to begin reading a Latin-based language like Italian or Spanish. The research of Professor Stanislas Dehane has proved the complexity and irregular spelling of the English language results in significant delays in the reading process. English does not have the same level of correspondence between sound and written form that occurs in some other alphabets, such as Spanish (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003). In a language such as Spanish, there is a direct relationship between sounds and symbols. They also need to learn the many pronunciations of vowels, including their sounds and stressed and unstressed syllables.

Levels of ESL Literacy

Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write (Haynes, J. (2006). According to the National Reporting System (2009), there are six levels of ESL literacy. The six ESL levels are: (a) beginning literacy, (b) beginning ESL, (c) low intermediate ESL, (d) high intermediate ESL, (e) low advanced ESL, and (f) high advanced ESL. Each of the ESL levels describe speaking and listening skills and basic reading, writing, and functional workplace skills that can be predicted from a person performing at that level.

Beginning ESL literacy. In the beginning stages of ESL literacy, students cannot speak or understand English. These students sometimes have little to no reading or writing skills in any language. They may have little to no comprehension of how print corresponds to spoken

language and may have difficulty using a writing instrument (National Reporting System, 2009). Learners at this level can often only communicate using hand gestures or a few isolated words. Beginning ESL students usually do not have knowledge of computers or technology.

Low beginning ESL. In the second level of ESL literacy, students can understand basic greetings, simple phrases and commands (National Reporting System, 2009). These students need repetition and can speak slowly with difficulty. They demonstrate little to no control over grammar. Low beginners can read numbers, letters, and common sight words. Low beginners can complete simple forms using personal information. Students may be able to sound out simple words but function with great difficulty in social situations. Additionally, they often have limited knowledge and experience with computers and technology.

High beginning ESL. Students in the third level of ESL literacy can understand common words, simple phrases, and sentences containing familiar vocabulary words (National Reporting System, 2009). These students show limited control of grammar. These students can sight read most words but have limited understanding. High beginners can write simple sentences using limited vocabulary and can function in familiar social situations. They can provide basic personal information on simple forms and may have some knowledge of computers and technology.

Low intermediate ESL. In the fourth level of ESL literacy, students can understand simple learned phrases and limited new phrases containing familiar vocabulary (National Reporting System, 2009). It is possible that these students can participate in some routine social conversations, although with some difficulty and have some control of basic grammar. Low intermediate students can read simple material on familiar subjects and comprehend simple and compound sentences. The sentence structure of these students lacks variety but shows some

control of basic grammar and consistent use of punctuation, including capitalization. Students at this level can interpret simple directions, schedules, signs, and maps. They can fill out simple forms but need support with more complex documents. Additionally, these students can use simple computer programs and can perform a sequence of routine tasks given directions using technology.

High intermediate ESL. Individuals in the fifth level of ESL literacy can understand learned phrases and short new phrases (National Reporting System, 2009). Most of them can communicate basic survival needs with some assistance. High intermediate students can participate in conversation in limited social situations and utilize new phrases with hesitation. These students have inconsistent control of complex grammar but can read text on familiar subjects that have a simple and clear underlying structure. Often these learners can use context to determine meaning and can interpret written directions. Students at this level have some ability to communicate on the telephone and can complete basic forms and job applications. In addition, many of these students are familiar with basic software applications and can follow simple directions for using technology.

Advanced ESL. Students in the 6th and final level of ESL literacy can understand and communicate in a variety of contexts related to daily life and work. The majority of advanced English language learners (ELLs) can participate in conversation on a variety of everyday subjects. Many of them demonstrate control of basic grammar but still have some difficulty using more complex structures. Advanced ELLs have some basic fluency of speech. They can typically read moderately complex text and use context and word analysis skills to understand vocabulary. Often these students can make inferences, predictions, and compare and contrast

information in familiar texts. In addition, advanced ELLs usually have the ability to follow along with radio and television, as well as use software and learn new applications with ease.

Native Language Literacy Background

As stated previously, an English learner's literacy background can greatly affect that person's ability to learn English. In addition to the six levels of ESL literacy, it has been argued that there are at least three levels of literacy background in a student's native language (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003). These levels include: (a) pre-literacy; (b) non-literacy; (c) semi-literacy.

Pre-literate learners. Pre-literate learners come from cultures where literacy is uncommon in everyday life. This also includes learners whose language is not written, has only recently been written, or is being developed (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003). These learners may have had little to no exposure to written text and may need to be taught how written language works. Pre-literate learners should receive individual literacy instruction because they generally progress slower than other learners and often require repeated teaching of skills and concepts.

Non-literate learners. Unlike pre-literate learners, non-literate learners come from cultures where literacy is available, but they have not had sufficient access to literacy instruction (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003). Although these learners have not learned to read, they most likely have a greater awareness of the value of literacy than pre-literate learners. Non-literate learners may be hesitant to unveil their limited literacy background in class. While the learning process may move gradually, these students are often highly motivated to learn.

Semi-literate learners. Semi-literate learners have usually had access to literacy in their native culture, but due to their socioeconomic or educational status, they did not attain a high

level of literacy in their native language (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003). Many of these learners left school at a young age for economic or political reasons. Often semi-literate learners have been referred to as "Generation 1.5" learners because they have immigrated to the United States and developed oral fluency in English; however, they are not literate in their native language and they struggle with English literacy. Many of the Generation 1.5 learners remain in ESL classes or end up needing special attention in college programs (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999).

TABE Reading Assessment

According to the McGraw- Hill/Wright Group (2006), the TABE reading assessment tests students' skills in vocabulary and reading comprehension. Students are tested on their ability to demonstrate skills in five reading areas. The following section will include an overview of these five reading areas: (a) constructing meaning, (b) interpreting graphic information, (c) understanding words in context, (d) recalling information, and (e) evaluating/extending meaning.

Constructing meaning. Reading can be defined as the process of constructing meaning through written text (Thompson, 2004). It is important for readers to make connections to their own experiences in order to construct meaning. Items on the TABE reading assessment that pertain to constructing meaning are based on the concepts of: (a) syllogism, (b) stereotypes, (c) identifying and recognizing character traits, (d) finding and identifying the main idea, (e) comparing and contrasting, (f) drawing conclusions, (g) recognizing and using cause and effect, (h) summarizing and paraphrasing, and (i) finding and using supporting evidence. When literacy experiences are relevant to students' interests, everyday life, or current events, it is much easier for a learner to construct meaning from reading.

Interpreting graphic information. According to Adler (2001) teaching students how to use graphic and semantic organizers (maps, webs, graphs, charts, clusters) will help them understand the relationship between ideas in text and in a figure. Items on the TABE reading assessment that are relevant to interpreting graphic information are based on the concepts of: (a)homographs, (b) using an almanac, (c) using a dictionary, (d) using an index, (e) using reference sources, (f) forms, (g) consumer materials, (h) graphs, and (i) reading maps. In order for students to learn to use the critical thinking skills needed to accurately interpret graphic information, they must learn to use visual learning tools.

Understanding words in context. Building vocabulary skills is fundamental to improving reading skills. Educators should provide unambiguous vocabulary instruction to assist English language learners to learn new vocabulary. Items on the TABE reading assessment that pertain to understanding words in context are based on the concepts of: (a) analogies, (b) homophones, (c) recognizing and using synonyms and antonyms, (e) recognizing and using context clues, and (f) spelling. Students need to practice these skills by using context clues to help define words and using a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003).

Recalling information. Much of today's readings use figurative language and it is therefore vital that students are able to identify and utilize this concept. Items on the TABE reading assessment that are relevant to recalling information are based on the concepts of: (a) similes and metaphors, (b) onomatopoeia, (c) identifying and recognizing details, (d) sequences, and (e) concepts. Students not only need to comprehend a reading, but also be able to recall the information that they read when necessary.

Evaluating/extending meaning. Effective reading does not end with a reader's arrival at the last word of the text. It is vital that the learning process continues well beyond reading a text. Retelling and summarizing are a few examples of how readers can evaluate and extend reading (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003). Items on the TABE reading assessment that pertain to evaluating/extending meaning are based on the concepts of: (a) biased language, (b) personification, (c) predicting outcomes, (d) identifying fact and opinion, (e) recognizing and identifying author's purpose and point of view, (f) recognizing and making generalizations, (g) identifying genre and style techniques, and (h) applying passage elements. Reading teachers must remember that what is learned after the reading is just as important as what is learned before and during the reading process.

Recommended Reading Strategies

According to Slavin and Cheung (2004), key elements of effective reading instruction include vocabulary, comprehension, and phonics. Experts say that the most effective ELL teachers construct a literacy approach that intertwines multiple factors, such as the construction of meaning from different perspectives, the use of relevant literacy materials, the acknowledgment of context in literacy learning, the use of language for real communication, and a focus on higher-order thinking and problem solving (Thompson, 2004). Teachers should be aware of how their own culture impacts their instruction as well as cultural implications that can impact students' learning of the English language. This includes taking into consideration assumptions about students' cultures as well as understanding the pervasive cultural stereotypes that exist in American society (Mason, 2008).

It is imperative that English language educators are aware of successful strategies to teach English language learners to read. Two of the most influential components of second language proficiency include syntactic proficiency, or comprehension, and vocabulary knowledge (Burt, Peyton & Adams, 2003). Therefore, in order to teach students to be successful readers, educators should try to utilize reading strategies to improve vocabulary and comprehension.

Vocabulary. According to Burt, Peyton & Adams (2003), reading specialists insist that a minimum of 3,000 words are needed to be able to read independently in a second language. There are two major components of vocabulary knowledge. The first component is breadth. This is the number of words that a learner knows or the number of content areas in which a learner is familiar with the vocabulary. The second component is depth. Depth is the total knowledge a learner has about individual words. This can include: (a) phonology (pronunciation), (b) orthography (spelling), (c) morphology (parts of speech, prefixes and suffixes), (d) syntax (how the word is used in sentences), (e) connotations (associated meanings), (f) polysemy (multiple meanings), and (g) register (word context).

Several strategies have been recommended to teach English vocabulary. Classroom teachers need to help ELLs build background knowledge and teach unfamiliar vocabulary before presenting a new concept (Haynes, 2006). If they do not teach unfamiliar vocabulary, the learner will not have sufficient background to understand the new concept or reading. According to Coady (1997), direct vocabulary instruction can improve reading comprehension, especially when it is utilized before the text is read. Texts that repeat vocabulary (Burt, Peyton & Adams, 2003) are more likely to be understood by English language learners. Vocabulary is also more

likely to be learned when it is key to the understanding of a text. In addition, computerized vocabulary activities may allow individualized vocabulary learning.

There has been disagreement on whether bilingual dictionaries should be used in learning vocabulary. Some think that bilingual dictionaries prevent learners from using context to determine word meaning (Burt, Peyton & Adams, 2003). On the contrary, others think that bilingual dictionaries may aid in understanding unknown words in a particular context. Regardless of whether bilingual dictionaries are used in the classroom, learners should be encouraged to use English dictionaries first.

Comprehension. The relationship between syntactic proficiency and English reading comprehension has been researched less than that of vocabulary knowledge. According to Burt, Peyton & Adams (2003), students with greater syntactic knowledge are better able to process text and use that knowledge to comprehend the meaning of the passage. In addition, students who understand the structure of expository and narrative texts are more successful in school (Thompson, 2004).

Several strategies have been recommended to teach reading comprehension. According to Goldberg (1997), students should be taught how to connect form with meaning and to identify cues that signal that connection. The teaching of grammar should be integrated with reading instruction to reinforce grammar, increase comprehension of text, and to provide a context for grammatical structures (Burt, Peyton & Adams, 2003).

Chapter III: Methodology

There is a need for further research to identify specific areas of the TABE Reading test, a testing instrument that accurately measures students' reading levels and accurately identifies each student's inadequate reading skills with diagnostic indicators that are problematic for English language learners. Therefore, the purpose of this study will be to determine specific reading deficiencies of transition English language learners (ELLs) at Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) who take the TABE Reading test and the average grade equivalent of transition ELLs at CVTC. This chapter will include sections on research design, subject and description, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What is the average reading level for ELL transition students at CVTC?
2. What inadequate reading skills did the ELL students demonstrate on the TABE Reading test?

Research Design

In the fall of 2008, 16 transition English language learners at CVTC were administered the TABE Reading test. Each student had 50 minutes to complete the multiple choice test. When finished, the tests were scored and each student was given a grade level equivalent between 0 and 12.9, with 12.9 being the reading level of a college student. Students also received a list of diagnostics that showed the areas of the test that were most problematic for them.

There were several variables included in this study: (a) the independent variable was each student's prior education in his or her native country, (b) the dependent variable was the students' scores on the TABE Reading test, and (c) the control variables were age, native

language, test, test location, and student status. All students were between the ages of 21 and 25. They all grew up in a country outside of the United States and have learned English as a secondary language. Each student was administered the TABE Reading test in the testing area of the Academic Services lab at CVTC. All students were transition ELL students at Chippewa Valley Technical College.

Subject Selection and Description

The 16 transition English language learners were administered a reading test to measure their reading grade level in order to determine their readiness to enter a program at CVTC. These 16 students were selected based on their desire to enter a program at CVTC. They all attended ESL classes and were identified as transition students based on their English language ability and their desire to entire a program. All of these students are from a foreign country and have learned English as a second language. Twelve of the students were Hmong and four were Hispanic. Ten of the students were male and six were female. All students were between the ages of 21 and 25.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to assess the students in this study was the TABE 9 Level A Complete Battery Reading Test developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill. The TABE Reading test is a valid testing instrument that accurately measures students' reading levels and accurately identifies each student's inadequate reading skills with diagnostic indicators. This test measures basic reading skills in life-skill as well as academic contexts and assesses beginning reading skills in a manner appropriate for adults. Items on the test calculate prose and document literacy, such as reading diagrams, maps, charts, tables, forms, and consumer labels (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 2009).

The results of the test indicate each student's reading grade equivalent and identify specific inadequate reading skills based on diagnostic indicators. The test consists of 50 multiple-choice questions. Each student was allowed 50 minutes to complete the test.

The TABE Reading test has five diagnostic categories that identify problematic reading areas for students: (a) construct meaning, (b) evaluate/extend meaning, (c) interpret graphic information, (d) recall, and (e) words in context. Each of the 50 questions fits in one of the five diagnostic categories and are therefore indicative of possible reading deficiencies in those areas. Each student received a grade equivalent based on the number of incorrect answers they provided on the test. The grade equivalent is calculated based on the number of correct answers provided on the test, based on 50 possible correct answers. The possible grade equivalents can range from 1.1 to 12.9, with 12.9 being the ideal reading level of a high school graduate. Each whole number of the grade equivalent represents a grade level, from first grade (1.1-1.9) through twelfth grade (12.0-12.9). For example, a grade equivalent of 5.5 would represent the reading level of a student halfway through the fifth grade. The Comprehensive TABE 9 Complete Battery Level A Reading Norms Table in the appendix lists the possible reading grade equivalents that students can receive (McGraw-Hill, 2006).

Data Collection Procedures

In order to properly collect data, the researcher formed step-by-step procedures to ensure that all data was organized and accurate. During the first week of the fall semester of 2008, 16 ELL students who were identified as ready to enter a program at CVTC were administered the TABE Reading test in the Academic Services lab at CVTC. All tests were administered and proctored by an instructional assistant. Students came into the lab independently to complete this

test in the quiet testing area. They sat in testing cubicles and were given a test booklet, Scoreze answer sheet, pencil, and timer. The TABE Scoreze answer sheet is user-friendly and allows the examiner to correct each test quickly by identifying incorrect items. The answer sheet consists of 50 items, with each item having four possible answers: a, b, c, or d. Each possible answer is inside a circle and the tester must fill in the correct circle to answer the question. The answer sheet consists of two pages that are separated by tearing them apart after completion of the test. Once pulled apart, the correct answers are white circles. If the tester has correctly answered the item, the circle will be filled in. If the tester has incorrectly answered the item, the circle will remain white. An example of a completed Scoreze sheet is available in the appendix of this study.

Students were given 50 minutes to complete the test, which gave them approximately one minute to answer each question. Each student's Scoreze answer sheet was collected and scored. After all student identifiers were removed, the researcher received copies of each of the 16 student's Scoreze answer sheets.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data in this study, the researcher had to tally the number of incorrect items on the test as well as the number of incorrect items in each diagnostic category. The examiner pulled apart each Scoreze sheet and marked each number that had a white circle as incorrect. She then tallied the total number correct on the test. Using the Comprehensive TABE 9 Complete Battery Level A Reading Norms Table located in the appendix, the examiner assigned each student a grade equivalent, which corresponded with the number of correct test items.

Each item on the TABE Reading test is classified under one of five diagnostic categories: (a) construct meaning, (b) evaluate/extend meaning, (c) interpret graphic information, (d) recall, and (e) words in context. On the bottom of the Scoreze sheet, each of these categories is listed along with a list that indicates which test items are in each category. The examiner identified which items were incorrect and circled the number of that item on the bottom of the Scoreze sheet in the diagnostic box.

Upon receiving the test results, the researcher calculated the average grade equivalent by adding the grade equivalents of all the students and dividing by 16. She then calculated the average number of correct items by adding the number correct of all the students and dividing by 16. In order to calculate the reading deficiencies in each diagnostic category, the researcher tallied the number wrong in each diagnostic category for all of the students and divided by 16.

Limitations of the study

The findings of this research are based on a specific case study that included only 16 transitional English language learners from the Chippewa Valley. Therefore, the findings and results cannot be generalized beyond the scope of this study. In order to generalize these results, the researcher should broaden the location of the study to other technical colleges across the country. The researcher could also attempt to recruit more subjects to take the TABE reading test.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to determine specific reading deficiencies of English language learners (ELLs) at Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) who take the TABE Reading test as well as to determine the average grade equivalent of CVTC transition ELL students. The TABE Reading test, which gives diagnostics to reading deficiencies, was used to gather information about the students' reading knowledge and to identify specific areas of reading that are problematic for ELLs. These findings will address the reading deficiencies of ELLs at CVTC. They will also identify the average reading grade equivalent of these students.

The Sample

The subjects for this study were ELL transition students from CVTC in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. A total of 16 English language learners were administered the TABE Reading test in the fall of 2008. Ten of these students were male and six were female. All of the students grew up in a country outside the United States and spoke English as a second language. Twelve of these students were Hmong and four students were Hispanic. All of the students were between the ages of 21 and 25.

Table 1

Sample Demographics

Ethnicity	Gender	
	Male	Female
Hmong	8	4
Hispanic	2	2

Average Grade Equivalent

The first research question that this study addressed dealt with calculating the average grade equivalent of transition English language learners at CVTC. To answer this question, the researcher administered the TABE Reading test to 16 ELL transition students in the fall semester of 2008. Next, the researcher scored each test and averaged the score for all of the students.

Table 2

Average Grade Equivalent

Student	Number Correct	Grade Equivalent
Student A	24	5.1
Student B	27	5.7
Student C	22	4.5
Student D	20	4.0
Student E	31	7.0
Student F	24	5.2
Student G	23	5.0
Student H	13	1.8
Student I	25	5.3
Student J	21	4.4
Student K	29	6.4
Student L	26	5.6
Student M	28	5.9
Student N	35	8.6
Student O	23	5.0
Student P	26	5.1
Average	24.8	5.3

It was found the average grade equivalent of CVTC ELL transition students was 5.3, which is just above a fifth grade reading level. The average number correct on the 50-question test was 24.8, which is slightly under 50% correct. Only one student achieved a grade equivalent over eighth grade. Since these students are doing college-level coursework at CVTC, they should be reading at a twelfth grade level at the very least.

Problematic Areas in Reading

The second research question that this study addressed dealt with identifying problematic areas of reading for English language learners at CVTC. To answer this question, the researcher identified the incorrect responses on the TABE Reading test for each student. The researcher then used the test diagnostics to identify which area of reading those items were categorized under.

Table 3

Problematic Areas in Reading Based on TABE Diagnostics

Student	Construct Meaning 17 Questions	Evaluate/Extend Meaning 13 Questions	Interpret Graphic Information 4 Questions	Recall 12 Questions	Words in Context 4 Questions
A	6	5	3	8	1
B	7	7	4	7	2
C	6	5	4	7	0
D	9	6	4	6	3
E	11	8	3	8	1
F	6	5	3	9	1
G	8	6	3	8	2
H	5	3	1	1	3
I	5	8	3	7	2
J	3	7	3	6	3
K	10	8	4	6	1

Student	Construct Meaning 17 Questions	Evaluate/Extend Meaning 13 Questions	Interpret Graphic Information 4 Questions	Recall 12 Questions	Words in Context 4 Questions
M	8	6	4	8	3
N	10	10	2	10	3
O	6	6	4	8	1
P	8	7	4	6	1
Average	7/17 41%	6/13 46%	3/4 75%	7/12 58%	2/4 50%

*Totals indicate number of correct items in each category

This section describes statistical diagnostic results for the students as a group for each reading skill area evaluated on the TABE Reading test using a 60% passing rate for each area. In the diagnostic category of constructing meaning, fifteen out of sixteen students, or 94%, had inadequate scores in the area of constructing meaning from the reading. The remaining student just barely received a passing score in this area with a 65%. The average score in this area was 41%. In the diagnostic category of evaluating and extending meaning, twelve out of sixteen students, or 75%, were unable to properly evaluate and extend meaning from the reading. The average score in this area was 46%. In the diagnostic category of interpreting graphic information, two out of sixteen students, or 13%, were unable to interpret graphic information featuring charts and numbers. The average score in this area was 75%. In the diagnostic category of recalling information, eight out of sixteen students, or 50%, were unable to recall information. The average score in this area was 58%. In the diagnostic area of words in context, eleven out of sixteen students, or 69%, had difficulty with vocabulary and understanding words in context. The average score in this area was 50%.

For the purposes of this study, any diagnostic average that is below 60% is indicative of a problematic area of reading. Out of the five diagnostic areas of the TABE Reading test, four of

these areas scores below 60% and therefore were problematic for CVTC ELL transition students. The area that was most problematic was "Construct Meaning". The area that was least problematic was "Interpret Graphic Information". In that section 37% (6/16) of the students answered all of the questions correctly. None of the students answered all of the questions correctly in any of the other four sections.

Chapter V: Discussion

Summary

There is a need for further research to identify specific areas of the TABE Reading test that are problematic for English language learners. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine specific reading deficiencies of transition ELLs at Chippewa Valley Technical College. More specifically, the study sought to identify problematic reading areas based on diagnostics of the TABE Reading test and the average reading grade equivalent of transition ELLs at CVTC.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What is the average reading level for ELL transition students at CVTC?
2. What inadequate reading skills did the ELL students demonstrate on the TABE Reading test?

The basic design for this investigation was qualitative and a 50-question multiple choice TABE Reading test was utilized to collect the data. All 16 students were identified as transition ELL students at Chippewa Valley Technical College and were between the ages of 21 and 25. They were all Hmong or Hispanic, grew up in a country outside of the United States, and have learned English as a secondary language at CVTC. Each student was administered the TABE Reading test in the testing area of the Academic Services lab at CVTC. Each student had 50 minutes to complete the multiple choice test.

These students were administered a reading test to measure their reading grade level in order to determine their readiness to enter a program at CVTC. All of these students are from a foreign country and have learned English as a second language. These students were selected

based on their desire to enter a program at CVTC. They all attended ESL classes and were identified as transition students based on their English language ability and their desire to entire a program.

The instrument used to assess the students in this study was the TABE 9 Level A Complete Battery Reading Test developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill. The results of the test indicate each student's reading grade equivalent and identify specific inadequate reading skills. The test consists of 50 multiple-choice questions. Each student was allowed 50 minutes to complete the test. The TABE Reading test has five diagnostic categories that identify problematic reading areas for students. Each of the 50 questions fits in one of the five diagnostic categories and are therefore indicative of possible reading deficiencies.

After administering the test, each student's Scoreze answer sheet was collected and scored by the researcher. Each student received a GE, as well as a diagnostic report of problematic areas indicated by the test results. In order to analyze the data in this study, the researcher had to tally the number of incorrect items on the test as well as the number of incorrect items in each diagnostic category. Then, the researcher calculated the average of each category and the average GE.

Limitations of the study

The findings of this research are based on a specific case study that included only 16 transitional English language learners from the Chippewa Valley. Therefore, the findings and results cannot be generalized beyond the scope of this study. In order to generalize these results, the researcher should broaden the location of the study to other technical colleges across the

country. The researcher could also attempt to recruit more subjects to take the TABE reading test.

Discussion of the Findings

It was found the average grade equivalent of Chippewa Valley Technical College transition English language learners was 5.3, which is just above the fifth grade reading level. The average number correct on the 50-question test was 24.8, which is slightly under 50%. Only one student achieved a reading grade equivalent over eighth grade. Since these students are doing college-level coursework at CVTC, they should be reading at at least a twelfth grade level.

Most of the TABE Reading categories were problematic for English language learners. Out of the five diagnostic areas of the TABE Reading test, four of these areas scores below 60% and therefore were problematic for CVTC ELL transition students. The area that was most problematic was "Construct Meaning". The area that was least problematic was "Interpret Graphic Information". In that section 37% (6/16) of the students answered all of the questions correctly. No student answered all of the questions correctly in any of the other four sections.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were made based on the findings of the study:

The results indicate inadequate reading skills contributed to each transition English language learner's inability to read at a twelfth grade level. None of the 16 students that participated in this study read above an eighth grade level and the average reading grade equivalent was 5.3, just slightly higher than that of a fifth grader. Furthermore, on average the 16 students experienced difficulty in four of five categories of reading based on the TABE test diagnostics.

ELL transition students at Chippewa Valley Technical College are permitted to enroll in program classes, despite their inadequate reading abilities. All of these students were accepted into programs at CVTC. In addition, these students were permitted to take regular program classes after taking one remedial reading course. According to the results of their TABE Reading tests most of these students did not have the adequate reading skills necessary to read college textbooks and course materials.

The area of reading in which CVTC ELL transition students struggled most was constructing meaning. This could be due to the difficulty of understanding concepts like identifying the main idea, cause and effect, comparing and contrasting, and finding supporting evidence. The area of reading in which CVTC ELL transition students struggled least was interpreting graphic information. This was most likely because these test items were based on maps, graphs, and reference sources instead of solely text. Since Hmong and Hispanic students use the same numeric system in their native languages as Americans do in English, it may have been easier for them to understand the items in this category.

The average reading level of transition English language learners at CVTC is 5.3, which is around a fifth grade reading level. This is far below the ideal reading level of a college student, which is 12.9 or above. This is most likely because these students transitioned into programs before they had adequate reading skills. ELLs often become uninterested in English language classes after a certain amount of time because they don't feel that they are progressing. They want to enroll in a program so they can start earning a degree and obtain employment. Unfortunately, when these students enroll before they are ready they often end up struggling with their coursework.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that future ELL transition students at CVTC have adequate reading skills prior to entering a program, the following recommendations have been made:

ESL instructors at CVTC should proactively teach research-based reading skills that focus on comprehension (constructing, evaluating, and extending meaning), vocabulary, and recalling information. They should particularly focus on the area of constructing meaning, which was the most difficult task for ELLs. It is recommended that instructors utilize *Contemporary's Achieving TABE Success in Reading* listed in the references section of this study as a tool to aid them in teaching these skills.

CVTC should offer ESL instructors more professional development opportunities in English language instruction, specifically in the area of reading. These opportunities could be offered at in-service sessions, workshops, as well as independent study. This will help instructors to develop new teaching strategies to implement the teaching of the reading skills listed above.

ESL instructors should administer the TABE Reading test to all ELL students who are interested in transitioning into a program at CVTC. If a student does not read at a high school level (indicative of a GE between 9.0-12.9), the student should return to English language classes. This will deter students from taking the COMPASS exam and entering a program before they are actually ready.

Transition English language learners should not take the COMPASS Reading exam (CVTC entrance exam) until they have achieved at least a 10^{th} grade reading level on the TABE Reading test. This will save students time and financial resources by not having to retake the COMPASS test due to inadequate reading skills. If the student does not achieve a 12.9 on the

TABE Reading test the student should continue to improve reading skills, even if he or she has been accepted into a program at CVTC.

Chippewa Valley Technical College should offer a remedial reading course section specifically for ELL transition students and offer the course each semester. The coursework would be similar to the traditional remedial reading classes offered at the college, but would focus more specifically on reading strategies for English language learners. This will allow ELLs to obtain individualized instruction that is geared towards students who speak a native language other than English. It will also ease ELLs into the transition to the traditional class environment by being surrounded by peers of equal ability instead of feeing inferior to their native English-speaking classmates.

Each ELL student interested in transitioning into a program at CVTC should meet with the Diversity/Equal Opportunity Specialist to create a Personal Education Plan (PEP), which will be tailored to each student's specific needs. The PEP will identify short and long-term goals, obstacles that may hinder the accomplishment of those goals, and a plan of action for each student. Identifying goals and obstacles will help recognize potential hurdles before it's too late.

Each ELL transition student should meet with the Diversity/Equal Opportunity Specialist every semester to monitor progress. They will have the opportunity to discuss course registration and financial aid questions as well as concerns about their program, instructors, and/or classes. This meeting should help improve the overall retention of ELL transition students and proactively identify student and instructor concerns before they become bigger issues.

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Appendix A

Comprehensive TABE 9 Complete Battery Level A Reading Norms Table

TABE 9 COMPLETE BATTERY LEVEL A
Table 28 Reading

				Reference Group					
				ABE—All			ABE—Juvenile		
NC	SS	SEM	GE	P	NCE	S	P	NCE	S
50	812	101	12.9+	99	99	9	99	99	9
49	763	69	12.9+	99	99	9	99	99	9
48	713	47	12.9+	99	99	9	99	99	9
47	683	38	12.9+	98	94	9	99	99	9
46	662	32	12.9+	97	90	9	98	94	9
45	646	28	12.9+	96	86	9	97	90	9
44	633	25	12.9+	94	83	8	96	86	9
43	622	23	12.9+	92	80	8	94	82	8
42	612	22	12.9	90	77	8	92	79	8
41	603	20	11.3	88	75	7	89	76	7
40	595	20	10.9	85	72	7	87	74	7
39	588	19	10.6	83	70	7	84	71	7
38	581	19	9.8	80	68	7	82	69	7
37	574	18	9.4	77	66	6	79	67	7
36	568	18	9.0	75	64	6	76	65	6
35	562	18	8.6	72	62	6	73	63	6
34	556	18	8.3	69	61	6	70	61	6
33	550	18	7.8	66	59	6	67	59	6
32	544	18	7.6	63	57	6	64	57	6
31	538	18	7.0	60	55	6	60	56	6
30	532	19	6.6	57	54	5	57	54	5
29	526	19	6.3	54	52	5	54	52	5
28	520	20	6.0	51	50	5	51	50	5
27	514	20	5.8	48	49	5	48	49	5
26	507	21	5.6	44	47	5	44	47	5
25	501	22	5.3	41	45	5	41	45	5
24	494	23	5.2	38	44	4	38	43	4
23	487	24	5.0	35	42	4	35	42	4
22	480	25	4.6	32	40	4	32	40	4
21	472	27	4.4	30	39	4	29	38	4
20	463	29	4.0	27	37	4	26	37	4
19	454	31	3.8	24	35	4	24	35	4
18	444	34	3.4	21	33	3	21	33	3
17	433	38	3.1	19	31	3	19	31	3
16	420	44	2.7	16	29	3	16	29	3
15	405	52	2.4	13	27	3	13	26	3
14	387	64	2.1	11	24	3	10	23	2
13	363	88	1.9	8	21	2	7	20	2
12	325	126	1.6	5	16	2	5	15	2
11	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1
10	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1
9	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1
8	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1
7	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1
6	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1
5	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1
4	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1
3	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1
2	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1
1	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1
0	300	151	1.1	4	13	1	3	11	1

Appendix B

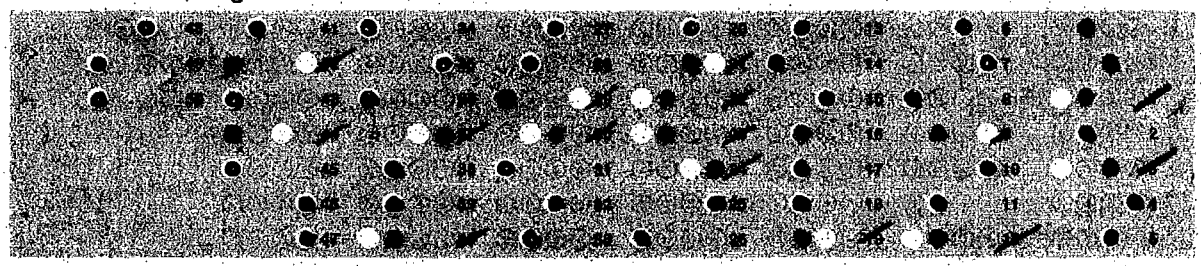
Comprehensive TABE 9 Complete Battery Level A Reading Scoreze Answer Sheet

If this circle is filled in, score this page.

SUMMARY OF SCORES

Test	Maximum Number Correct	Number-Correct Score	Scale Score	Percentile Rank	Stanine	Grade Equivalent
1 Reading	50	35	562			8.6

Test 1 Reading



Reading

Construct Meaning: 2, 5, 7, 18, 20, (21) (22) (23) 27, (29) (30) 31, 32, 36, (42) (44) 45, 49

Evaluate/Extend Meaning: (3) 4, 6, 15, 16, (19) 25, 28, 33, 34, 35, 39, (40) 41, 48, 50

Interpret Graphic Information: 8 (9) 10, (12)

Recall Information: 13, 14, 17, (24) 26 (37) 38, 43

Words in Context: (1) 11, 46, 47